



A Modern Feminist Critique of Doris Lessing's The Golden Notebook (2010)

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Abstract- "The women who decide to become housewives and stay at home, this is the actual death of women, and slow poison for their creativity and soul" (Friedan, 2019: 6). In view of the said issue, this paper unfolds women conflicts, in particular, in family life in Doris Lessing (2010) novel, *The Golden Notebook* from a Modern Feminist perspective that stresses on the women's liberation from the fetters of family that are used to deprive them of using their talent. The paper unveils the situations where the women are coerced when they surge out for their civil liberties. The qualitative study investigates *The Golden Notebook* (2010) from the Modern Feminist perspective. The study found out that they came across diverse family conflicts when they tried to challenge the patriarchal norms and how their souls and resourcefulness are crumpled at home and outside the home, in particular, those who are married. This study also traced the signs of discrimination of male member with a female at sexual and emotional levels. The study reveals women's political, sexual and family conflicts. It also found out the multiple sexual relationships did not let woman's personality flourish. The paper also examined that women could not be free in a family structure.

Keywords: Modernism, *The Golden Notebook*, women conflicts, family, and patriarchy

I. INTRODUCTION

Modern feminism is a universal concept focusing on the patriarchy to be the main conflict in society. Modern feminism emphasizes career-oriented independence for women instead of domestic life. Betty Friedan launched modern feminism, notably the most successful movement of 20th century. It argues that men have the power to control all affairs of women including like fashion, beauty, the idea of motherhood, in unpaid households in society. To defeat the patriarchy, women need to know their value and for they work in unity. They develop relations with other women as a sisterhood and trusted each other for the complete progress of social change. *The Golden Notebook* is about the experiences of the novelist's life that she spent in South Africa. Anna was living in London Flat where she met her friend Molly after a long time. Her friendship with Molly is trusted and sisterhood of Modern in her life. Anna wrote four colored notebooks including red, black, yellow and blue. Each notebook tells a different story consisting of different experiences and memories of life. The Black Notebook is about Anna's recollection of her memories in Africa during World War II. The Red Notebook is about Anna's political life when she lives in London. The Yellow Notebook is about Anna's alter ego-Ella. Ella has similarities with Anna's character as both are divorced with a child. Both of them are involved in politics. Ella falls in love with Paul, a doctor. Paul has a wife Muriel, but Paul left Ella and Ella left writing due to mental problems. The Blue Notebook is a personal diary of Anna in which she records everything and keeps it secretly with Mrs. Marks. Molly's son Tommy is affected by family conflicts chooses to attempt suicide. Anna's daughter is also the prey of conflict to take admission in boarding-school. Anna's love affairs, gender inequality and conflict in her. Anna sexually betrayed for satisfaction and it creates tension in her family. Her first famous novel is *The Grass is Singing*, published in 1950 but the most notable work that recognized her internationally was *The Golden Notebook* published in 1962.

II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The family conflicts in this novel show an important role due to the limited study in this field. In Modern feminism at the first attempt that *The Golden Notebook* presents the role of women in family life. The proposed study analyzes the close study of gender inequality and conflict in this novel. It also investigates the manpower in family life and political life of that time. This study shows male discrimination with a female in sexuality. This study depicts a close study of gender, family conflicts in society. If a woman oustes the patriarchal code of life, then she becomes liberated herself as individual. Individual liberty is necessary for women's freedom. The study is important for family conflicts, that have a deep impact on family relations. Family conflicts in gender relations are the most popular issues on Modern Feminism. The women are victimized in the patriarchal society and women have complex family relations in modern times. These

relations affect their family life. The foremost aim of the study to clarify the status of a woman in a patriarchal society. Women are used sexually, but not free in marrying a man. Women joins politics to get equal rights. This paper therefore seeks to answers as to how women are sexually subjugated and emotionally rejected in family life from the hand's masculine society and how far Lessing, 2010, 2010 been successful in projecting family conflicts in *The Golden Notebook*.

III. PREVIOUS RELATED STUDIES

Lessing, 2010, 2010's *The Golden Notebook* has been analyzed by many researchers in different ways in the literature. But the previous works is not a deep study of gender issues related to family conflicts. The previous study is unable to show the hidden meaning of the text. Gender is a vast topic and it is unable to analyze it in one work. Catana (2015) used symbols for an explanation of her concepts about language problems with Anna Wulf. Canata explains in her study about 'Gender influence in Doris Lessing, 2010, 2010's *The Golden Notebook*' that Lessing, 2010, 2010 described the female quest for identity by using symbols in the novel. The golden notebook shows the reality of life in the vivid description of these ladies in the search of perfect matches. The language problem reveals gender issues. Lessing, 2010, 2010 female characters show great interest in political and social life. That is the characteristic of professional females in society. Anna Wulf develops many sexual experiences for a perfect match (Catana 2015:26).

Jassam(2017) explains, that Lessing, 2010, 2010 here used taboos areas of women. Sex is also taboo and she uses it distinctly. By sexuality, man gets supremacy over a woman. Women arose theses feelings her beauty. In this novel, women equalize male in their sexual role, but not in beauty Here woman depends on men for sexual requirements, and it is the outer effect of the society. These two women are independent, free and live in a London flat alone. Anna suffers from mental illness due to being they are free (7). In the novel *The Golden Notebook*, beautiful women take advantage of their beauty, as Maryrose is an object of pleasure, for Willi for other men of society. She has a boyfriend, but he is not interested to marry her, so she marries an older man with children. Anna feels gloomy, by men non-serious attitude to women. But for all, this sexuality triumph in rebellious attitude against male oppression. Lessing, 2010, 2010 used successfully sexual subversion in female oppression. The women are sexually free, but Ella the fictional character, does not enjoy her physical relationship with George. That's why Ella rejects George sexual love There are frequent sex scenes shows sexual taboos. But all the characters have the same attitude towards sex(Lalbahsh Wan Yahya,2017:94). In paper about Women's writing and writing about women: analysis of *The Golden Notebook* by Doris Lessing, 2010, 2010 Marysa says that women are not truly liberated, as Anna has certain domestic obligations which showed her as a typical housewife. Anna feels bitter about Michael because of her responsibilities. As Mother Suger said to her that this resentment is impersonal (Butsel 2009,39). Divya explains in a research paper, that Lessing, 2010, 2010 and feminism both are intersections among gender, class, sexuality, race, and nation because the movement is responsible for feminism. And Lessing, 2010, 2010 labeled with unwilling feminism. Lessing, 2010, 2010 heroines inner self have a quest for self-identity, Anna knows her inner self and finds the meaning of life through political affairs and sexual relationships. Anna self-awareness is depicted by her writing and reading (Divya| 2017:113). Sophia Barnes (2013) in an article about "Doris Lessing, 2010, 2010 was a Modern, in the truest sense," said that she does not like to classify her work, and not wanted to understand it, so there is uncertainty in her reader's minds. Lessing, 2010, 2010 lived through the Second World War, in which every kind of conflict grabbed her era.

Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* is a vast novel and has a variety of topics to be discussed by different researchers. Every critic shows a different aspect of the novel, gender issues in language problems show the symbolic study of the novel. The gender issue is a vast topic and it is not manageable in one work. Here Woman develops sexual affairs for her identity crisis. Women are oppressed sexually and mentally by lovers and mothers are oppressed for their children. Lessing is modernly more than a feminist writer because woman struggles for liberation not for her rights. But in this struggle, they suffer a lot. Anna writing blocks are shown in one paper clearly that her fear of dark dreams and emotional death. Both are living a free life, but psychologically they are under the control of men. There is an otherness attitude between mother and daughter. But it is a Modern society where men have all powers if a woman wants to get of this situation she will live life alone. She is under the control of man for sexual requirements and mental health. The woman is bound in her family; she is a mother and wife. Friedan (2001) describes the working woman role in their family.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is qualitative in nature to answer the research questions. The central source of the study is the novel *The Golden notebook*. The chief aim of the study is to examine family conflicts that create inequality in men and women. The present study is explorative and based on library books and internet resources. A close reading of textbook and library books is employed to find out the family conflicts under Betty Friedan's modern feminist perspective. The present study focused on the female status and value in Modern feminism, the female role in family life, the relationship between man and woman, the relationship between children and parents in a rapid change in society. The fictional character of Ella, in the yellow notebook and Anna's character and sexual relations and their effects on her family life and her friend's Molly life of Modern feminism has shown the sexual molestation and domestic problems of their family life. Anna identity crises in her relationships with multiple men as a free woman make intoxicated her in mental problems and conflicts. It represents women's oppression in family life by the hands of man.

Betty Friedan's Modern feminism is the theoretical framework of the study. This part gives an overview of Betty Friedan Modern feminist theory that has been used to evaluate Doris Lessing (2010) *The Golden Notebook*. The family conflicts have been used to give the answers to questions that are raised in problem statement. The main ideas are developed by Betty Friedan to analyze the gender inequality, women's oppression, sexual oppression and mental oppression of women in friendship with a man and woman in family life. Modern feminism Betty Friedan gave us a complete theory about the woman's identity. The problems of women oppressed in family life are due woman crises of identity. The researcher investigated that the main conflict in a woman's life is due reproduction, education and lack of professional development. Friedan gave us a complete description of housewives and house maker. *The Golden Notebook* is investigated woman oppression at home. Friedan gives us the woman's identity in life. Women struggle to get their identity. Friedan described the gender inequality the problem that has no name. After reading the novel the researcher explores more work in this field with a new angle.

V. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter, the data are analyzed in the qualitative method. Gender relations in family life created critical issues in Modern feminism and family conflicts are responsible for women oppression. According to Friedan, a woman has to sacrifice her choice to become independent lady. He believes that she needs to search her potential ability as a mother, as a wife or homemaker. Women spend their whole on thinking about their child's future development and ignores own identity. Women lost their identity in making their children's future.

Anna's daughter, Janet, is also the prey of conflict that she wanted to be a high-class girl, but Janet wanted to be an ordinary girl, as at the end of the novel, her mother clears that her daughter is the prey of conflicts when she said, "I know you hate all that, but why should I? It will be a conflict for you." "I don't think it will," said Janet, suddenly sullen, reacting away from the idea that she could ever accept her mother's way of life enough to conflict with it" (Lessing, 2010, 2010, 561). Janet is against her mother wishes, she decided to go to boarding school because she wanted to escape from her mother living style. Janet is not satisfied with her mother living style and knows that her mother's life is going from mental problems due to multiple sexual affairs. Both mother and daughter have conflicts about their thinking.

Doris Lessing (2010) *The Golden Notebook* is a famous novel for women's issues in family and professional life. The patriarchal power controls women's life. In *Yellow Notebook*, Julia and Ella converse about their sexual freedom, "sometimes I think we're all in a sort of sexual madhouse." Ella says drily: 'My dear Julia, we've chosen to be free women, and this the price we pay, that's all' (404). Woman is not free in her thinking in masculine society. Anna is not interested to live alone and her daughter is the only way of her normality. The family structure is based on oppression as in *black notebook* when Anna stayed at Mashopi hotel saw Mrs. Lattimore from the half-open window and she was crying, her husband in drunk abusing her wife. "You whore. You ugly whore. You barren bitch." This had happened before. She lifted her ruin of a face to us, pulling at her lovely red hair with both hands, the tears dropping off her chin. Her dog crouched besides her, whining softly, its head in her lap, and the red feathery tail swept apologetically back and forth across the floor. Mr. Lattimore took no notice of us at all. His red ugly eyes were fixed on his wife: 'you lazy barren whore. You street girl. You dirty bitch" (Lessing, 2010: 148). This kind of attitude is very harmful to a progressive woman's society.

Moreover, Anna wanted to be married, but here in *The Golden Notebook*, women have no right to say anything about marriage. Men have wives, but they are not happy with them, and multiple affairs with women, who are divorced or single. Marion was a Richard second wife, she drunk much due to her husband love affairs and unfaithfulness. Richard is responsible for her wife destruction and making a joke on her. A married woman is living a miserable life, she is happy for not married like Richard that shows a picture of

a bad husband. Anna used unhappy married life as a “strain” expressed her emotions about Marion and Richard life, that “It might be a strain, living as I do, but at least I don’t live with people like Marion and Richard, I don’t live in the world where a woman can’t have a male lodger without spiteful jokes being made” (Lessing, 2010: 251).

Sexual politics also affects family life in *The Golden Notebook*. Many housewives are suffering from depression and pessimism. They depend upon their husbands. Most of women have sacrificed their whole life for the family as in case of Ella, a fictional character of Anna in the *Yellow Notebook* who expressed her feelings of love, “I won’t sleep with a man until I know I could love him” (ibid, 402). Ella wanted to start writing, but sexual conflicts prevent her from writing, she is unable to find her true identity with sex, when she said to Julia that, “She rings up to announce Julia that she has given up sex, given up men, because ‘she can’t be bothered’... Ella decides to write again, searches herself for the book which is already written inside her” (2010, 404). But perhaps it is true that the moral dilemma of society is no longer crystallized by the fact of an illegitimate child?” (Lessing, 2010:132). Anna is an active lady and she is progressive that she believes that women will change. She is a Modern woman of her age and believes that the world will change. Jackson told her that, “you, for instance, who genuinely believe that the world can be changed” (ibid, 142). Tension of friendship and family in *The Golden Notebook* is important from the perspective of a woman's role as in *Black Notebook*, Maryrose wanted to marry Paul but he did not marry her. Maryrose said about him, “He comes from a good Cape family, and his parents won’t let me marry him, because I’m not good enough” (Lessing, 2010:11). Sheila said that marriage main aim is love, and husband's responsibility is to love, respect and protect his wife, as Jackson was a kitchen worker, but he loved his wife and happy with her although he earns little money. In this kind of family, the husband has a good character, as George said to Willi “Do you realize what it would mean if Jackson got the sack? The whole family would be sunk” (ibid, 143). He is lucky in this sense that he has a good and peaceful family. But Paul in *The Yellow Notebook* is not a good husband, as he said, “I’m not exactly proud of myself as a husband” (ibid, 205). Anna is communist and this party is joined by people whose family members are in this party, “and then there are those who are lonely, and the party in their family” (ibid,162). Besides, she did it after careful thought.’ Or: ‘Of course, there was that broken marriage, It must have affected Tommy more than anyone guessed.’ ‘Oh quite so,’ Anna would say, smiling. ‘And there’s my broken marriage. I do so trust that Janet won’t end up the same way” (Lessing, 2010, 2010, 333). Feminism becomes complex with the thinking of women, Women become more complex as it has no one point that you may study it. With the development of women thinking developed in gender complexity. According to Firestone, Gender is complicated as computer and technology advancement. Firestone has a deep study of the previous knowledge about feminism and wrote *The Dialectics of sex* in which he expressed that technology has strong used for women when they utilize it liberate themselves from gender inequality and family conflicts.

The role of gender inequality in *The Golden Notebook* also creates women's oppression. After all domestic and professional affairs, when at night women go to bed beside their husbands, they think, “Is this all?” In Modern feminism gender inequality still has no name. When Anna meets Reggie and felt relaxed to converse with him, but at home, women lost their mental health, “At home I collapse into depression than angry self-disgust” (Lessing, 2010:262). Women are unhappy with their married life, and children because of their husbands. Husband attitude is stressful with wives and it creates identity crises in women. Betty Friedan gives reason to her reluctance as stated that it was the question about “who am I?” Which means what is her identity?(ibid 26). Do they understand what they have? What is known about them, as Janet’s mother or writer? Anna stated “I was stuck fast in an emotion common to women of our time, which can turn them bitter, or Lesbian, or solitary. Yes, that Anna, during that time was...” (ibid, 421) She joins the party voluntarily and they all pass their time with good ideals. They wanted to reform the world and communist is the best option for them. According to John, “the reason why we don’t leave the party is that we can’t bear to say good-bye to our ideals for a better world” (ibid, 156). Anna feels painful depression for her daughter but still, she bears all with calm and humble. “I have been very depressed. I have been depended a great deal on that personality-Janet’s mother. I continually asked myself- how extraordinary, that when inside I am flat, nervous, dead, I can still, for Janet, be calm, responsible, alive?” (ibid, 435)

VI. CONCLUSION

Sex and love are opposite feelings, for love, sex is required, but for sex love has no need. Anna loves Michael and wanted to marry him, but he rejects her. Her daughter is everything for her, and she wanted a good education for her, but Men are responsible to create conflicts in her daughter's mind. Anna's political and sexual life also affects her life because she did not give much to her daughter. Man takes advantage of her sexually and emotionally. Patriarchal power abused women in professional and family life. Professional life is attached with family. Anna left Communist party and Michael left Anna. Anna life conflicts depend on her

friendship with Molly. There are many examples of women maltreatment in marriage, and Anna is happy being free woman life but she wanted to marry for love. Modern feminism in Doris Lessing, 2010, 2010's The Golden Notebook revealed Anna's political, sexual and family conflicts. Her multiple sexual relationships controlled her personality from developing her personality. The paper also reveals women's sexual molestation in The Golden Notebook. It examines that they are denied of including them in the family structure which makes them unhappy as Anna is not exultant with her sexual relationships. Anna wanted to do sex with whom she loved, but she is used for sexual purposes. Women maltreatment in The Golden Notebook is also the cause of their satisfaction. Anna wrote the famous novel The Frontiers of war and earns money to survive. Molly and Anna both are free in sexual life and paying for freedom. Many women are facing problems due to patriarchy as Richard wife Marion is stressed and drinks much to avoid the stress of her husband. Drunken husbands and wives are playing the worst roles in their family life. The study also explores that blood relationship does not maintain a relationship, but it that matters with friend. Ella and Julia's friendship ends with Paul withdrawal. Julia left her when was facing mental problems. The psychoanalysis of all characters can also be explored on the novel in modern and conventional way to show the real picture of women.

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